

Testimony on HB 4208
Chris Hunter, Director
Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing
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Madame Chair Farrah and Committee Members,

My name is Chris Hunter, Director of Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing with the Commission on Disability Concerns in Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth. This bill has the support of a 13-member Governor appointed Advisory Council.

This legislation, PA 204 known as Deaf Persons Interpreter Act became law in 1982 to cover the courts and administrative hearings only. This was passed before the Americans with Disabilities Act that began in 1990 and the amendment of Michigan Handicapper Civil Rights Act in 1986 to require the use of sign language interpreters as effective communication for deaf and hard of hearing persons who use American Sign Language. In 1994 the DODHH Advisory Council began the discussion on the need for amending PA 204 after experiencing the problems our deaf and hard of hearing people experience in our state.

In the fall of 2003, a referent group of at least 30 representatives from schools, agencies and organizations began to develop a proposal that will define qualifications of interpreters and address developing an adequate supply of qualified interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing students in educational settings. One of their strategic directives is to support amending PA 204 or developing new legislation to license interpreters.

The need for legislation arose because more and more unqualified interpreters have been hired to work in schools, colleges, banks, doctor's offices, lawyer's office, etc. Allow me tell you one story: A hearing son and deaf father went to a bank to sign on loan for the purchase of \$100,000 tractor. The bank did not hire professional interpreter but allowed the son to interpret. The father cosigned the contract. The son, the truck driver, later fell behind in his loan payments and to father's surprise, his house was repossessed. The father did not know that his house was listed as collateral to the loan. This bill can prevent such situations from happening. The qualified interpreter being impartial can convey full and effective communication between the loan officer and deaf father.

We did a survey of interpreters working in our state in 2004. Our survey received a total of 212 responses. Of them 13 percent of this total were not qualified. We found that 24.4 percent of interpreters were not qualified (working in Michigan public schools). The Department of Education is revising the Rules to include new standards for the interpreters in K-12 schools.

DODHH has been conducting quality assurance tests on interpreters since 1983. The state now has over 400 QA and over 90 nationally certified interpreters. When this bill becomes law, the program will continue. There will be no increased cost to the state. In our QA program, our interpreters earn QA Level III when they score 88% or better on performance test, QA Level II is 74 to 87% and QA Level I is 60% to 73%. 60 percent means the interpreter is able to convey 60 percent of the message from a deaf person to a hearing person. DODHH proctors a national test

called the Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment and maintains the directory of qualified interpreters.

We believe that this bill will not only make communication more effective and equal but it will increase the supply of qualified interpreters in our state. It will improve the lives of between 50,000 and 100,000 deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind citizens who use interpreter services. The bill has support from the Michigan Deaf Association, Inc and Michigan Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf which are named in the bill.

Are there any questions?

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